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AUTHOR Magne, Olof
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ABSTRACT

This Swedish paper discusses the design of an inclusive curriculum for students with disabilities based on Rousseau's concept of a social contract. The importance of a curricular philosophy in which social competence and ecological conditions are crucial provisions in shaping the curriculum is discussed. The social contract philosophy is used to examine the role of the school and the individualization of education for children with special needs. By using a factor-interplay model of teaching, educators would simultaneously consider in designing an educational program the content of a proposed learning program and the student's capacity to learn the information. A student-centered curricular theory is presented in which each student's performance and interests are considered and topic areas are prioritized according to the needs of the student. Ecological perspectives are examined along with the importance of a harmonious educational climate. Guidelines are provided for the educational process, including making education tolerant of and meaningful to students with disabilities, providing an appropriate education, encompassing naturalized and actualized learning, teaching practical skills for daily application and competencies of a prevocational and vocational nature, and directing education toward the total person. (Contains 21 references.) (CR)

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Occupational opportunities and social competence

Olof Magne

October 1996

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The concept of social contract, *contrat social* according to Rousseau, has been followed up in our day, in a certain sense. The legisative systems of UN and the Council of Europe have introduced several human rights in order to bring about security of life and welfare. These international laws may be interesting from a didactic point of view. The State tends to prescribe *uniformity* in education by means of collective curricula. These regulations of instruction may clash with other aspects of school's obligation to care for the citizens, for instance to lay the foundation of an optimal future quality of life for the students which, of necessity, must be individual. This care stresses *plurality* in learning and teaching. From such a point of view a uniform, collective curriculum is not undisputable. The human rights movement of our days has stressed the importance of a curricular philosophy where social competence and ecological conditions would be crucial provisions in future curricular revisions in order to promote individualisation of knowledge acquisition and societal inclusion, particularly among students with special educational needs.

Keywords: Curriculum, disability, ecology, factor interplay model, human rights, inclusive education, individualisation, social competence.

Introduction

The life situation is serious for many school leavers who had problems to learn the elements of national curricula at school. Furthermore, conditions are apparently getting worse in many European countries.

Many are unemployed who were considered students with special educational needs. Some face social problems, including drug addiction and criminality. Others display physical and mental complaints or illnesses.

The results of their school learning are often very meagre, if not to say miserable. Let me take the case of Claes who was educated in regular classes in Sweden and now wants a job at the age of 19. His occupational opportunities are very low indeed.

He reads a short text hesitatingly but afterwards knows very little of the main contents and sometimes misses the point of the story. Spontaneously he reads nothing. If he gets a comics magazine in his hand, he looks at the pictures only. He writes on dictation with defect spelling. He can produce a short message on his own but would not dare to write a letter even to a near relative or to his teachers. He would be confused if somebody asked him to fill in a form at a post office or a bank. Claes has given up hope to be an intelligent reader.

Claes's management of mathematical topics is equally insufficient. His teachers have used a lot of sensible ideas and equipment to get him to learn addition and multiplication tables. In a way his mathematics learning has been successful. Claes knows quite well that a number fact like 2+3 can be represented by two sets of objects, for instance two apples and three plums. The union of these sets might be called 'five fruits'. He no longer hopes that he will be able to

be fluent one day.

He finds his way cleverly in the neighbourhood. He knows all the bus lines and how to travel by train to nearby places. His interest in timetables is noteworthy. Thus, he knows what time of the year trains and busses change timetables, and can also tell all the times of his bus line (between his home and his school) for every day of the week. He is reluctant to use telephone. He prefers asking people to get information and hopes that they know better than he does. Money has very little precise meaning for him, but he knows that he must use them. He has no idea about banking, saving, hire purchase. He has no realistic interpretation of principles for football pools, horse racing, lotteries, bingo etc.

He might suggest that Stockholm is the capital of Sweden. Washington may be 'the capital of America' and London of England. He has some elements of historical knowledge. Typical is that he enumerates the kings of Sweden in modern times.

There are other things that Claes also is capable of remembering. One curricular example is that he has learnt to memorize the symbols for the chemical elements.

Summarising, Claes has very low retention of what the school attempted to teach him. But more remarkable is the impression that Claes has become a shallow consumer of superficial routines. He is unenterprising, timid and lacks both motivation and hope of achievement.

Claes can observe. He can talk. Han can move and transport himself. There is no obvious physical impairment. As all his relatives seem to behave normally, there is little likelihood of genetic incapacity. But he has shortcomings in his perceptive brain cells and a strange confusion in the way how to organise his sensations, experiences and

recollections. The diagnostician says that he has a perception, thinking and organising handicap.

Claes 'trains' in a mechanical way, not because of the teacher but his own specific motivation and strategy. If kept within the limits of the school's curricular topics, the main part of his many thousands of repetitions do not come further than to his eyes and lips. His sensory organs may signal to his sensory brain and motor brain. What he is doing in these situations *is to not perceive*. Perceiving is a voluntary, organising activity but for him with little connection with his school curriculum.

But apparently he sometimes is capable of using this perceiving, thinking and organising ability. In a few contexts his memories are deeply rooted. Claes's efforts to learn has left some paradoxical results of good achievement, but in very specific areas of knowledge. This happens often outside the regular academic school work. Why? And How?

We attempted to analyse the memorising and thinking ability of Claes experimentally. Claes seems to learn as all other adolescents do, namely with the help of metacognitive skills. This indicates that he probably has a capacity to learn much more of the topics in the school curriculum than he does. An example. In one experiment he was told that he might be able to learn the following series of eleven digits if he could find a rule for the construction of the number sequence:

8 12 14 16 18 20.

He kept studying the digits for nearly two minutes and suddenly cried out, "I see it. There is two between." And then he reproduced the sequence. Also the following day he remembered the sequence.

It may be that mentally handicapped children have lower metacognitive resources than average children (cp. Baldassa and

Moniga, 1994; Herriot, Green and McConkey, 1973, and Nelson, 1984), but the conception is well supported that also, for instance, Down children are capable of metamemory learning styles.

The conclusion seems to be that Claes learns things which belong to two different, although not unrelated fields, that is to say (a) *topics which he is particularly interested in* and (b) *topics related to his own social competence.*

In Norway and Sweden a special curriculum of this kind can be worked out according to new provisions in the national school laws.

What could Claes do? It seems first of all necessary to quit the formal academic way to learn the curricular subjects. This is something the German special educator Gotthilf Hiller (1991, 1995) and Olof Magne (1994, 1995) have suggested. Next thing would be to find an alternative to the type of learning he has used.

For Claes and many of his equals an alternative might be to change the approach to learning fundamentally and concentrate on "social aspects" that may have present and future relevance for Claes, maybe more prevocational experience. Claes must feel to be at the centre of his particular learning field.

Recently, a *factor-interplay model* (Magne and Thörn, 1988) has been proposed as a rationale for mathematics learning. Naturally, it is not limited to mathematics.

Through the individual's learning, not just a disabled person, runs the connecting thought that

(1) All human beings interact with their environment and vice versa.

(2) In each study situation the school *offers* subject matter; the student reacts to them affectively and cognitively and, thus, *constructs* knowledge and various skills through his/her own

active effort.

(3) Social competence results from the interplay of social stimuli in the environment and the active social involvement of the student.

(4) Social competence is an expression for the growing individual's increasing aptitude of responsibility for himself/herself and other people.

The factor-interplay model implies that the educator simultaneously considers (a) the content of a proposed learning programme and (b) the student's possible capacity to learn the stuff. The teaching must be based, for instance, neither on the mathematical subject matter alone nor on the supposed mental deviations of the student. An interplay between subject matter and student must determine the shaping of the programme.

As a summing-up of this discussion, teaching should be founded on a down-to-earth policy where the *capacity for learning* and the *present and future interests* of each student would constitute the frame of reference for individualising learning with respect to the intellectual, affective and social development of each student. A key-word might be *social competence*. But social competence is highly variable. This means probably that, in a wide sense, for a highly capable student the school curriculum seems extremely unsuitable because his social competence may be so advanced that the curricular specifications seem very childish to him or her. For a person with special educational needs the specifications of the curriculum mainly fall outside his or her competence field. It is possible that a school curriculum may seem unrealistic for some students if their general social competence should be considered.

"Le contrat social"

Hobbes, Montesquieu, Pufendorf, Rousseau, Kant, Hume and Schopenhauer do not attract very much attention as social philosophers in our days. From a didactic point of view the thoughts of some of these authors may lead to individualisation of the students' school and home work. A social philosophy comes from them which briefly is as follows.

The relation between those in power and the subjects is in some way settled by an agreement or contract, *contrat social* according to Rousseau. The conception is already familiar to Hobbes and Pufendorf and indicates that an unbridled state of nature is being replaced by the mankind through surrendering the state of nature in order to secure public safety of life, property and welfare. As time goes on, it becomes important to emphasise individuals' or groups' liberty of choice in this agreement, namely that citizens preserve their natural rights and privileges. The *public will* would be the supreme true sovereignity, and it belongs to the citizens. But through the fictitious agreement the sovereignity is transferred to the community. This dilemma may involve optional constitutions, democracy, oligarchy, autocracy etc., and in the system there is an element of contrariety, of tension, as the authors stress that the power of the State rests with the individual members of the community since the individuals have a common interest to look after their human rights.

The agreement theory was supported by Immanuel Kant during the first part of the 19th century, but was later rejected by German historians. With Hegel yet another great system builder appeared. Instead of the nature right he suggested the *absolute reason* which may manifest itself in many forms and, thus, in one manifestation becomes the State. The State is, however, only authorised through the reasoning

man.

An example: The Swedish Constitution states that "All public power emanates from the people". However, when it has parted with its power the people can only implicitly control this power. In the modern society, more-over, power is a uncontrollable force that comes into conflict with the interests of the people.

Social psychological and sociological researchers have extended our knowledge of the relations between state, communities and individuals. Relativism is nowadays guiding the legislative philosophy. Nevertheless, there is an increasing belief that individual and group values and rights must be safeguarded. The legislative systems of the UN and the Council of Europe cover a great deal of human rights in order to bring about security of life and welfare.

Let me demonstrate how some of these ideas may be interesting from a didactic point of view.

Students work together in our integrated school in spite of the fact that they display great variations in physical, affective and cognitive endowments. The school can get into trouble if the state wants all students to reach a uniform curricular objective. Two problems may arise: Shall the state insist on the official uniformity at all costs? Or ought the state to allow an individual student with special educational needs to try to attain his/her own competence after setting separate curricular goals? Special educational needs may then be defined as a negative or positive or both negative and positive evidence. In other words:

1. To what extent may the prescribed curricular objectives be remodelled in order to fit students with special educational needs?
2. Is it legitimate for individuals to confine themselves to own

learning goals?

For schools and for the teachers, the result would be varying loyalities and responsibilities. Let these consequences be called contract conditions or commissions, derived from principles of human rights. Examples of possible situations are the following.

• The state looks upon itself as the primary mandator and, therefore, wants to sanction learning objectives through the school law and often also the curriculum in the form of a standardised national document, but may also permit exceptions to the rule. This type of curriculum tends to be a *collective curriculum.* Education is principally a state necessity. In the official contract condition a request is included to aim at *uniformity* of effects of schooling. This request, however, clashes with at least two other aspects of the school's obligation on care of the citizens. The perspective is here called principle 1.

• Even if not directly contracted, in relation to student and parents, the school seems to be informally commissioned to lay the foundation of an optimal future quality of life which, of necessity, must be individual. This commission stresses *plurality* in the learning and teaching. From this point of view a uniform, collective curriculum is not indisputable. This may be called principle 2.

• In the educational reality there is also a loyality among colleagues. In the community of interests of the school staff exists a striving after self-realisation. Within this frame, various activities are in progress concerning cooperation, further education, management studies, among other things. Thus, all teachers do not necessarily like to teach in the same way. This approach seems to accentuate *plurality* more than uniformity and represent a principle 3.

Between these various commissions there is some degree of tension. The students have different starting positions since their birth.

Their interests vary. They work according to varying learning styles and make stronger or less strong effort. In consequence they learn different things to differing depth in various subjects. On one hand, according to available research it seems unadvisable and, in fact, impossible to force all students to achieve the same goals in their education. The student should be at the centre of education. On the other hand, can students and parents claim against the state that they have a right to individual learning goals?

Modern ideology and didactics aim at finding room for optimal inclusive education as well as optimal individual learning. Inclusive education may be interpreted as a balance between uniformity and plurality of learning goals. The problem remains whether school shall implement inclusive education and, at the same time, promote effective individualisation.

"Student at the centre" – A new curricular thinking

A traditional national curriculum was previously assumed to be a standardised collective regulation in the interest of the state (principle 1, p. 5) which might be interpreted as an expression for particular aims of the state to bring about uniform objectives of education.

The approach to this curricular theory is in terms of frames. A frame is conceived as the mechanism through which the educative process in the classroom is steered from levels above the educative process. Conditions in the society are assumed to govern the educative process through objectives and organisation. The central administration looks out into the society to perceive demands and aims, then looks into schools and directs its actions in order to guide (or try to guide) the

educative process. By allocating money it hopes to control certain space and time conditions for the educative process in the school.

However, this mainly behavioristic curriculum theory seems to show shortcomings. Here is an, in itself, incomplete list of flaws in it.

(1) In reality this curriculum steers only imperfectly.

(2) Behavioristic belief in training ("drill") is incomplete.

(3) Learning is no mere formation of associations ("bonds").

(4) The student can learn, the teacher can not "learn out".

(5) Learning is not a collective process.

(6) The learning process varies from person to person.

In the foregoing it was also suggested that the school may have other obligations than just state interests. Psychodynamic theories have the common foundation that indivdual feelings and needs are of primary importance in the life of the growing child. Some basic needs should be satisfied if the child would develop a healthy personality, for instance need for love, security, attachment, belonging, success, independence and a personality identity. In this case the child is at the centre of education.

It is possible to formulate a curriculum from the rule that the student is at the centre of education (see principle 2, p. 5). In that case

- Firstly, the performance and the interests of the student should be taken into consideration, and
- Secondly, those topic areas are priorited which the student needs first hand.

This way of looking at things is fruitful in the education of students with special educational needs, for instance Claes. The attached figure 1 illustrates the assumed relations between student and the school organisation. The graph has placed the student at the top. From the top position, arrows proceed in various directions showing how to

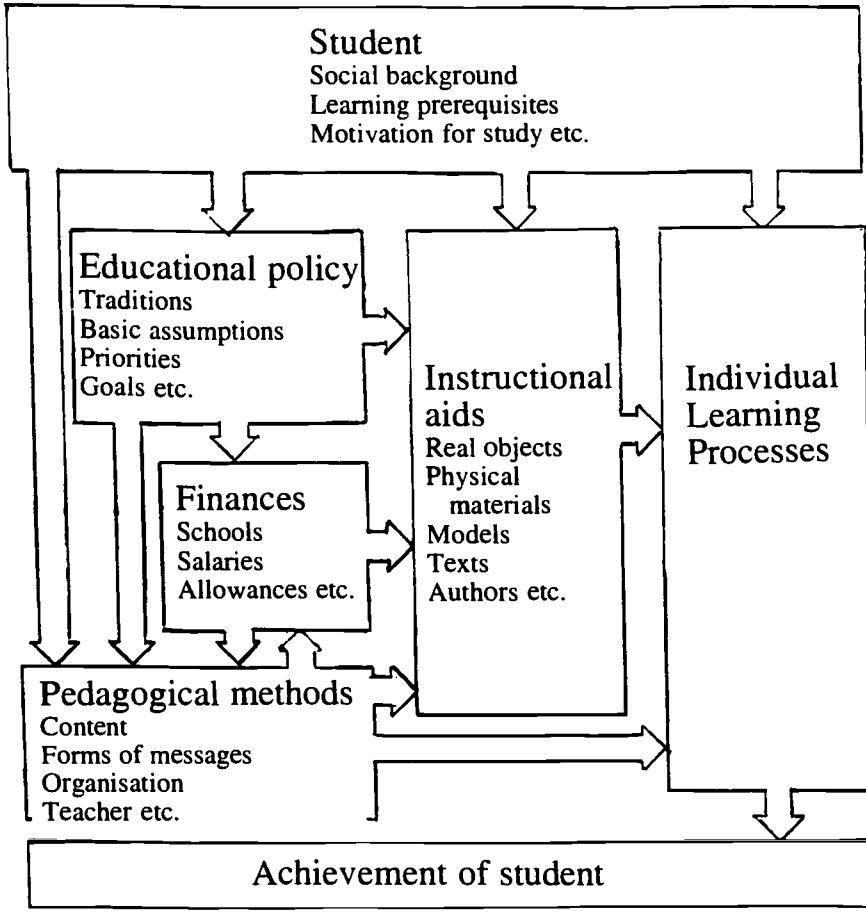

Figure 1. Student based educational philosophy (Magne, 1978).

progress in the course of planning. Planning would take place according to the needs of Claes. A programme should be worked out, not only for the present situation but for prognostic purpose. Therefore,

the support to Claes should be organised and financed by means of a diagnosis and prognosis of his particular prospects, not from general collective routines. For a student like Claes this concerns for instance

- The adjustment to the educational policy as well as the financing of the education of the special needs student.
- The pedagogical methods (learning, teaching) etc.
- The supply of instructional aids, and
- The individual learning itself.

It is a plausible hypothesis that this educational approach leads to higher efficiency in the learning of a student with special educational needs.

The curricular philosophy may also consider the realism of national curricula. How viable is a national collective curriculum?

In the most extreme case, the student may be allowed to direct and decide upon learning and education. This can be rejected for good reasons.

But some self-service seems to be realistic. It is acceptable that Claes and Susan make different things when they learn to solve mathematical problems.

Constructivist theories are at odds with behaviorists concerning collective curricula. A constructivist curriculum might be composed of two parts:

(1) A collective part which tells how the school and the teacher could tutor and individualise the students' work according to some general principles.

(2) An individualised part with course recommendations of a constructive type where learning is thought to be a private affair. The teacher might find impulses in this part how the student participates in the class fellowship to invent a suitable

syllabus, how the learning may promote the mutual and special needs and interests of the students.

Ecological views

We cannot stop just here. What we observe in the classroom is a social practice. Teachers and students jointly and interactively communicate and at the same time influence each other. Applying a sociological or ecological perspective leads to another understanding of school learning than the individualistic approach we sofar have considered. Hobbs (as early as 1975) clearly documented the inadequacy of our current categorisation system and the limited diagnosis – intervention system, or child-only focus, on which it was founded.

To organise the work of the class is a main responsibility of the teacher. The third principle discussed on p. 6 would be applied to meet the common needs in the interaction within a school class.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed his *Ecology of human development*. In Europe we know, for instance, Kruse, Graumann and Lantermann (1990). Sociological and ecological education theory is concerned with the interaction between organism and environment and seems to have a great potentiality for application to special education. Instead of only looking upon individuals, ecologists interest themselves in interactive systems comprised of living things and the natural settings that surround them. Ecologists do not consider disability as a physical disease located only in the student. The ecologists prefer to look at, for instance, an emotionally disturbed child as a "disturbed ecosystem". The trouble might be described as a failure to match conditions in the social environment. A simple way to locate a student in an ecosystem

might be a pictorial representation (figure 2).

Note that the student is at the centre of his own micro-ecosystem and that both home and school environments are contained in a wider ecosystem.

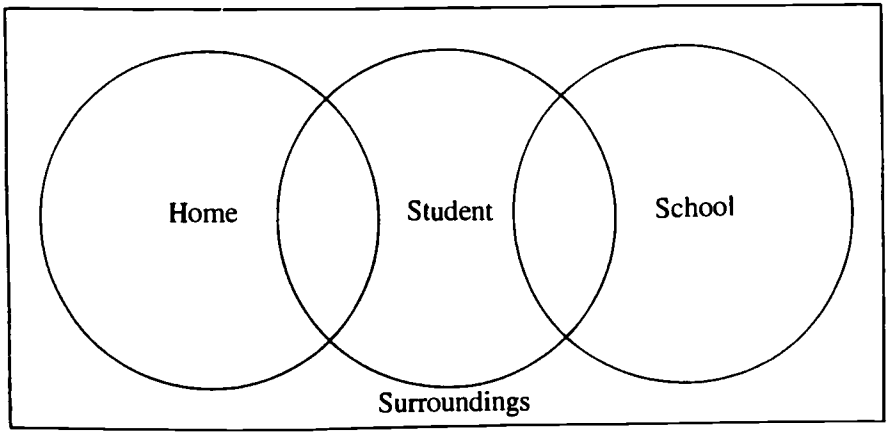

Figure 2. Representation of a student in an ecosystem.

In addition to the stimulus-response dimensions of the factor interplay model (p. 3) we have to think of the powerful social/ecological dimension. Let us presume that knowledge is created by aid of teacher-student and student-teacher interaction in the classroom. The active learning always takes place in a social situation. Teacher and students carry on a conversation whereby they influence each other. The individual student is activated in his thinking, problem solving etc. by school mates and teacher and, outside the school, by parents, relatives, friends even if we assume that the actual learning is a private process.

With Bauersfeld (1995) we may expect every class/group to build up an unconscious group culture, typical for each class or group. In this culture various forms of conventions or customs appear, for instance concerning school subject matter and social behaviour. The social communication often leads to conflicts, aggression, controversies but, otherwise, to friendliness, solidarity, considerateness, mutual understanding and helpfulness. The social interaction may eventually result in a feeling of participation, if group activity ends in a harmony which is experienced and accepted by everybody. This is what the teacher and students should attain in a mainstreamed class.

A harmonious educational climate may be a basis for societal integration as well as individualisation. In a class various networks may appear, primarily togetherness in a spatial sense, secondarily as mental and emotional activity, mutual interests and comfort. In their social attitudes the students may discriminate between "we-groups" and "they-persons". To be accepted as a participant/member is a crucial feature of the we-group. It is equally important that the student gets a realistic attitude that all fellow students differ and must be allowed to be different. The we-group must be a group where all do more or less different things because of natural individual variations. In the school all students shall have the right to be unequal.

Accordingly, a teacher ought to aim at variations of the learning conditions of the students. The teacher's planning should involve both easier and more complex programmes for the students. This planning procedure ought not to be a too serious problem. In fact, many students are on a rather similar level of achievement. Usually the number of programmes do not exceed two or three per class.

Claes and his job preparations

The ecological network idea might be useful to help Claes to create an appropriate individualised study programme in cooperation with his teacher, classmates and, outside the class, his parents and family. It may also vitalise the social climate in a more general sense.

Let us make an intellectual experiment. Suppose that Claes had learnt at school after the lines just now suggested. He should belong to a regular class as in fact he did. His curriculum would have been adapted to his particular interests, knowledge and social competence, that is a special individual curriculum according to the Norwegian-Swedish model. We could hope for an accepting, friendly and supporting attitude in this class. The following main guidelines for the educative process are cited from Newcomer (1980, pp. 341-342):

- Education must be tolerant and have meaning to the daily life of Claes.
- It must be appropriate, considering the individual's strengths and weaknesses, conceptual level, physical development, age, interests etc. It should have both behavioral and academic objectives.
- It should include naturalised learning. Either planned or spontaneous, a teacher can use experiences outside the classroom for learning activities.
- It must include actualised learning. The student needs to use the acquired knowledge and skill for practical purposes, including prevocational orientation.
- As early as possible the student must learn practical skills for dailyapplication and competencies of a prevocational and vocational nature.

• It must be directed towards the total person.

Some authors have discussed or described experiments on educational ecology and given examples of efforts to work effectively with curriculum development in order to supplement or move away from traditional programmes toward an ecological model of learning for troubled children. Documentation can be found in Apter (1982); Apter et al. (1979); Braband & Kleber (1983); Donovan (1989, 1990); Hiller (1991); Hiller et al. (1995); Magne & Ohlin (1992); Thimm (1977); Wittoch (1996).

A new approach to curriculum construction represents no complete innovation of the integration process, if anything a future challenge under the goal aspect of societal inclusion. General education but also special education may be stimulated towards further investigations of conditions and prerequisites for a changed philosophy and practice of curricular developments. The main part of this research and development process no doubt belongs to the future.

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